

If I Was A Rose (maybe you'd pick me) by AabH

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Summary:

As requested by the prompt 'A really angsty one sided Byler story'. This will be a lot of hurt with absolutely no comfort involved.

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The first time he noticed Mike and El holding hands, there was a strain, a little tug in the pit of his belly that ached so much he actually touched it: like that would help anything. The first time he saw them kiss, the pain in his stomach moved to his chest and he had to excuse himself just so he could get some fresh air and calm down.

He'd pressed a hand to his chest and tried to justify the pain as heartburn or some other physical ailment. The thought that his chest hurt so bad he could have cried was too uncomfortable to even consider that it might have been brought on by emotions alone. Nothing going on in his head could possibly hurt so bad that it would have a physical reaction, right?

If I Was A Rose (maybe you'd pick me)

Author's Note:

This is for the Tumblr Anon who requested an extremely angsty, one sided Byler story. Please pay attention to the tags, because they are there for a reason.

There wasn't anything wrong with him, at least not physically, not that he could find with his own naked eye. Well, there clearly *was* something wrong with him, but it didn't have to do with any malformations or deformities of the flesh. Other than the slightly crooked way he smiled, when he managed a smile at all, and the marks on his skin that his mom assured him were called *beauty marks*, Will couldn't find any reason Mike wouldn't want him.

Except for the obvious one that hung between his legs.

Because that, more than any amount of awkwardly developing body and occasional breakout of acne, had to be what the problem was. For fuck's sake, El had looked like a boy when Mike met her, when she'd saved Will's life, and it hadn't meant he didn't like-like *her*. At first Will understood the lingering fascination and pinning Mike for her when she disappeared after killing the monster that haunted the Upsidedown. Even to Will, that was the most badass thing he'd ever heard of, and all he had to go on were second hand stories. He'd spent his own time there, facing down the thing that seemed more born of his nightmares than anything else, and all he'd been able to do was run. All he'd been able to do was hide and try to stay alive.

And he'd been excited to finally meet her, the hero who'd saved him and probably the whole town with just her mind. Will liked her a lot and didn't protest at all when she joined the party. It was nice to have someone new, someone quiet he could sit with and talk to. Or, it had been nice at first.

Loathe as he was to admit it, even to himself, that changed pretty quickly. His curiosity and gratitude morphed into something else, something *darker*, and less comfortable. The first time he noticed

Mike and El holding hands, there was a strain, a little tug in the pit of his belly that ached so much he actually touched it: like that would help anything. The first time he saw them *kiss*, the pain in his stomach moved to his chest and he had to excuse himself just so he could get some fresh air and calm down.

He'd pressed a hand to his chest and tried to justify the pain as heartburn or some other physical ailment. The thought that his chest hurt so bad he could have cried was too uncomfortable to even consider that it might have been brought on by emotions alone. Nothing going on in his head could possibly hurt so bad that it would have a physical reaction, right?

He'd been woefully, painfully wrong of course, and that little, crushing pain in his chest didn't go away. It hurt more and more the longer Mike and El dated until it was an ache so deep it felt like Will could have died from it. While it never stopped hurting, it did evolve again: this time to something so close to anger he was ashamed to even call it that. How could he be *angry* with someone who'd saved his life? She hadn't even done anything wrong; nothing besides sneak her way in like a shadow in the night and take all of Mike's attention and-

-That was besides the point. Whatever El may or may not have done shouldn't have been enough to make Will feel something so close to jealousy that he wanted to vomit whenever it crossed his mind. That was something wrong with *him*, not her. He shouldn't feel anything even *close* to jealousy about the budding romance between the pair, and at first, Will had tried to justify it. He just missed The Party being together, he missed all the hours spent on the walkies just talking about dumb things while they were supposed to be doing homework, and he missed Mike sleeping over with him. Only, none of that had stopped. They still did all of those things, even if it was less frequently. When Will realized he didn't have that horrible, visceral reaction to Lucas and Max, when he barely even blinked at the two of them touching or kissing, he started to wonder if there was another reason, something else wrong with him other than a simple desire for things to remain the same.

Because the thing was, he *didn't* want things to be the same as they always had been. *He* wanted to be the one to hold Mike's hand and

explore what it might be like to kiss him. He knew it was wrong, and that boys didn't do that with each other, but he wanted it anyway. The most painful part of it all was that he didn't want it with just anyone; that would have been easy enough to achieve after the first 'alternate lifestyle' bar opened, just outside of downtown. No, he wanted it with Mike.

'Can you believe that shit? I mean, right here in town?'

'Yeah, it's pretty weird,' Will agreed, resting his head against his forearms from where he slouched over the handlebars of his bike. Honestly, it wasn't that weird. In the light of day, when the guys that worked there were just standing around smoking and chatting while they waited for the bar to open, it didn't look any weirder than any of the places in Hawkins people had been stumbling in and out of for years.

'Robin's been in there you know. Dustin told me that she said it's just a bunch of half naked guys grinding all over each other, people doing drugs, and hooking up in the alleys.'

Will glanced over at Mike, trying to decide if he was talking about it because it was something that interested him personally, or because it was just the hottest gossip Hawkins had had in ages. It was hard to tell since the look on Mike's face seemed to alternate between fascination and disgust with equal measure. Will looked away, back to the smoking men as they loitered around chatting, and shrugged.

'I'm sure that's an exaggeration. No one's doing drugs and hooking up in plain sight.'

'Yes they are. I bet if we came back tonight we'd see it firsthand.'

Will looked at him again, frowning.

'You want to spy on people?'

'What's to spy on if nothing's happening?'

So they'd gone back that night, watched from between the fence slats when people milled around, smoking pot and cigarettes while they spilled more of their drinks than what actually ended up in their mouths. Will watched in interest when he saw people of the same sex flirting, right

there, out in the open. He felt himself almost jerk away from the fence the first time he saw a couple kiss. Instead of doing that, he pressed himself closer, trying to memorize what he saw. He only pulled away when he heard Mike make a sound close to a jeer.

'Jesus Christ, that's disgusting.'

'Y- yeah.'

'Can you believe that queer shit's happening here? C'mon, let's go.'

It was after that incident at the bar that Will realized that no matter how much it might fascinate him, no matter how much he might have daydreamed about Mike taking his hand and looking at him the way men and women looked at each other, it would never happen. He could stand in the mirror and scrutinize himself for hours, buy the most expensive shampoos he could afford and the best colognes, but Mike would *never* want Will because he just didn't have the right parts.

Even with that knowledge, even knowing that it was a hopeless, pathetic endeavor, it didn't stop Will from trying, just one time when he'd had too many drinks to think clearly and reconsider his actions before they even started.

*The house was big, it belonged to someone in Mike's neighborhood, or maybe Steve's, Will couldn't really remember. He'd gotten there by hitching a ride with an acquaintance from his advanced painting class (Mike couldn't take him. He and El were going to a movie first, and Will hadn't been invited). Once the party got underway though, Will lost track of his classmate. It had hurt his feelings at first that even Enid had ditched him, but after a while, the ache faded. It didn't **really** matter, because once he got enough alcohol in his system, Will's usual shyness melted away, and he became something close enough to a social butterfly that he didn't even care who he was sharing smokes with or who he was doing body shots off of.*

Still, as time wore on and Will found himself wandering the yard (at least he was pretty sure it was the same yard as the house was seated on) looking for a place to puke, and he stopped caring all together. He'd just about found the perfect place to empty his stomach when he'd tripped over

someone spread out on the grass, totally hidden from the light of the house. In the dark, and drunk, it took Will longer than it should have for him to realize it was Mike who was passed out (or something near it) beneath his feet.

Will flopped down, excited to see a friendly face that was happy to see him because of familiarity, not just because they were too drunk to realize who they were talking to.

‘Hey, what are you doing out here?’

‘Stargazing,’ Mike mumbled, rolling his head to the side to look at Will. ‘You?’

Looking for a place to throw up seemed less than eloquent, so he just shrugged.

‘Taking a walk. It’s too noisy in there.’

‘Yeah.’

‘Where’s El?’

‘Dunno. Left her inside when she and Max started making out. Drunk girl on girl action sounds hot until you realize they kinda forgot you exist. So I came out here,’ Mike explained, rolling his head back and forth in what Will assumed was supposed to be a shrug.

Will had hunched his shoulders and drew his knees up to his chest. He thought Mike said that ‘queer shit’ was ‘disgusting’. Maybe it was different for girls.

‘Does El let you do that?’

‘Do what?’

‘Kiss other people.’

Mike chuckled, a slow, half gurgled sound.

‘Dunno. Never asked.’

'You ever want to?' Will whispered, not sure why he said it. He glanced down, watched Mike shrug again, as if it was a stupid question.

'Sometimes.'

Will lowered his chin to his knees and let it stay there.

'Who do you think about kissing?'

Mike made another sound, something unintelligible.

'Becky Rogen's hot. Pam... Pam... oh shit, what's her name? You know, the one with the tits?'

Will shook his head, not sure. 'The one with the tits' could be anyone. Anyone except him.

'Darcy?'

'Yeah! Pam Darcy! She was looking so fine tonight.'

Will glanced down at himself. He didn't look 'fine' or 'choice' or anything like that. He didn't look like anything other than plain old Will.

'Anyone else?'

'Nah, I dunno. Probably. Why? You think about kissing people?'

Will shrugged, and realizing Mike couldn't see it, cleared his throat.

'Sometimes.'

'Have you ever done it?'

'Not really.'

'You're missing out,' Mike sighed, closing his eyes. 'And c'mon Will, it's a party. Someone in there'll probably kiss you.'

'It's okay.'

'C'mon Will, don't be a wimp. Just go in there and pick someone. Try your luck. You never know, you might get a date out of it.'

Will curled closer around himself. If he'd been a little more sober, if he had been thinking more clearly, he wouldn't have allowed what happened next to transpire. Will knew for a **fact** that he wouldn't have, because he'd had the opportunity to do it before and always refrained. The days at the quarry, the nights in the movie theater alone, and the once in a blue moon sleep over they had over holiday weekends where they'd do nothing but marathon movies and video games; each and every one of those was as good an opportunity to try as any. Still, **'that queer shit'** hung in the back of his mind as heavy as a millstone, so he never tried.

But Mike was right there, and he was so pretty, and he'd said Will should just try. So despite his better judgment, Will felt himself uncurl, almost like he was watching from somewhere else instead of living it, and leaned over his friend.

At first, nothing happened. Mike didn't speak or move at all, and for a moment, Will wondered if he'd passed out. Then there was a movement beneath him, where slack lips tightened and a tongue swept across Will's mouth, asking to be let in. Will of course let him, because holy shit was that actually happening and did it mean Will had been wrong? When a hand found his hair and tugged him down, Will felt his chest tighten so hard it felt like it might burst like an overripe peach. When the hand in his hair moved to his face in what Will thought was meant to cup it, he almost cried he was so happy. Instead of a gentle touch, he felt his cheek sting when Mike patted it too roughly, in something that wasn't a slap but was too drunk to be anything tender.

'Jesus Will, you must be desperate. I need to find someone to fuck you before you become a full on fag-'

'-Shut up,' Will whispered, anger and humiliation making him hot. 'Shut the fuck up, Mike. You sound like Troy and the rest of them.'

Mike blinked up, like he had just realized what he said.

'Jesus Will, I'm just kidding, calm down. I don't really think you're a homo,' Mike grumbled, pushing himself up onto his elbow. Will pulled away, angry and embarrassed. He should have held his tongue, should have reigned himself in, but he didn't. The alcohol was making him stupid and he knew it, but there was nothing he could do to stop himself.

'Would that be the worst thing if I was? Is the worst thing you can think of being a faggot, Mike? Why? You think there's something wrong with it? What if I wanted to kiss boys or suck dick or-'

'Stop it, Will,' Mike whispered. 'You know that those people get sick and die. That what you want? To get sick and wither away with sores all over your skin till you can't even catch a cold without worrying about dying?'

'Of course not,' Will snapped, shoving Mike so hard he actually knocked them both off balance. For a while, Mike just lay there, looking at him. Then, he ran a hand across his mouth, as if to wipe away the kiss, and scowled.

'Are you? Jesus Christ Will, are you actually a queer? Have you been hooking up with other guys? Did you kiss me when you might be sick?'

*Will flushed even hotter, beyond humiliated. Mike had trusted him when he was possessed, when he'd **actively** hurt people while under control of the Mindflyer. Did he think so little of Will now, now that he thought Will might be gay that he thought Will would do that? That he'd fuck around with people he didn't know the medical history of and then what, be reckless enough to get Mike sick too? Besides the fact that Will wouldn't do that, he was pretty sure that's not how the virus worked at all. As he watched, Mike pushed himself sloppily to his feet.*

'Jesus Will, what's wrong with you?'

Will couldn't speak. He couldn't even breathe. He just sat there in the dark, watching Mike stumble away, back towards the house.

*Will looked in the mirror, and for the first time, hated himself. He'd never had the highest self esteem, and he might have had passing fantasies of taking a few too many of his antidepressants, but he'd never actually *hated* himself before. He was talented, artistic, creative, and by all accounts, as handsome as an awkward seventeen year old could be, he supposed. But the way Mike looked at him, the way he'd be so repulsed by him, *that* made Will hate himself.*

He'd sort of hoped Mike would forget it, that he'd been too drunk to remember any of it, but when Monday rolled around, Mike didn't sit with him during chemistry. He didn't seek Will out at lunch either,

and when he hadn't even talked to Will by Wednesday, he knew it was over. All of it, all the nights awake talking on the walkies, all the sleep overs, and hours of hanging out in Mike's basement were all gone. Knowing that, and knowing that *he'd* been the one to ruin it was almost too much to bear.

Because he still wanted Mike. He still wanted his friend (well, *ex friend*) to look at him like he was the only person in the room. Will still wanted Mike to kiss him, and in the deepest regions of his heart, wanted Mike to *love* him. He knew it wouldn't happen, that it *couldn't* happen, no matter how much he desired it. The fact that Mike would never want him was something he'd been prepared to live with his whole life if he had to. The fact that Mike wouldn't even *look* at him anymore... that was a harder pill to swallow. Much harder than the ones that sat in their bottle, balanced on his sink.

Author's Note:

Dear Anon, I hope you enjoyed this story and that it satisfied your desire for something extremely sad without even an ounce of happiness to it.

As always, comments and kudos are appreciated.

Be well and take care of yourselves.